

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: TECHN, IN

SUBJECT: INDIAN NUCLEAR EXPLOSION: HIGHLIGHTS

OF DR. SETHNA'S

PRESS CONFERENCE

1. DR. HOMI SETHNA, CHAIRMAN OF THE INDIAN ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION, SSTATED AT A MAY 20 PRESS CONFERENCE IN BOMBAY, THAT THE AEC WOULD CONSIDER THE QUESTION OF HAVING MORE UNDERGROUND NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS IF MORE DATA IS REQUIRED. DR. SETHNA SAID THAT THE FIRST PROCESSED DATA FROM SATURDAY'S TEST EXPLOSION MIGHT TAKE SIX MONTHS AND UNTIL THEN HE WOULD NOT LIKE TO ELABORATE ON THE USES OF WHICH THE LATEST KNOWLEDGE AND PROGRESS COULD BE APPLIED. HOWEVER, THIS DATA WILL BE OF INTERNATIONAL INTEREST. SETHNA STATED ONE OF THE AIMS WAS TO STUDY WHETHER IT WAS POSSIBLE TO STIMULATE OIL AND GAS IN DEPLETED OR LOW-YEILDING FIELDS. HE POINTED OUT THAT THE USA WAS USING GAS BUGGY AND PLOWSHARE TECHNIQUES TO STIMULATE GAS, WHILE THE SOVIET UNION WAS CONCENTRATING ON STIMULATION OF OIL FIELDS. ASKED WHETHER THE TECHNIQUES COULD BE USED AT ANKLESHWAR IN

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GUJARAT WHERE OIL FIELDS WERE DRYING UP, HE STATED, "LET US

STUDY THE RESULT OF THE EXPERIMENT AND THEN WE CAN DECIDE WHAT WE CAN DO." DR. SETHNA SAID STIMULATION OF OIL AND GAS BY NUCLEAR EXPLOSION WAS CHEAPER THAN BY CONVENTIONAL METHODS WHICH INVOLVED ADDITIONAL DIFFICULTY OF PUTTING A LARGE DEVICE UNDER GROUND. ASKED IF HE HAD PLANNED MORE PNE (PEACEFUL NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS), DR. SETHNA SAID THAT SUCH EXPERIMENTS WERE NOT PERFORMED FOR THE FUN OF IT OR TO SATISFY ONE'S EGO. THERE MUST BE NEED AND USE FOR IT. INDIA WOULD CERTAINLY GO AHEAD IF IT COULD BE OF SOME USE IN THE CONDITIONS EXISTING IN THE COUNTRY. HE ADDED, "OUR NUCLEAR ACTIVITY HAS BEEN PEACEFUL AND WILL CONTINUE TO REMAIN SO."

2. DR. SETHNA WENT ON THE STATE THAT THE DATA, TIME, AND PLACE FOR THE EXPERIMENT HAD BEEN LEFT ENTIRELY TO HIS CHOICE. IT HAD NOT BEEN DICTATED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AS WAS BEING ALLEGED. THE EXPERIMENT ARRANGEMENTS COULD NOT BE DONE IN A MOMENT'S NOTICE. HE EXPLAINED THAT IT HAD BEEN A "CONTAINED EXPLOSION," IN THE SENSE THAT RADIO CACTIVITY HAD BEEN CONTAINED TO A VERY LARGE EXTENT." NO MORE ON THE SUBJECT COULD BE SAID UNTIL AFTER CHEMICAL ANALYSIS. HE DECLINED TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ABOUT THE EXPERIMENT SITE, EXPENSES INCURRED, PREPARATION TIME, NUMBER OF SCIENTISTS AT THE EXPERIMENT SITE, AND QUANTITIES OF IMPOR- TANT MATERIAL USED. NO FOREIGNERS OR NEWSMEN OR POLITICIANS WERE PRESENT AT THE EXPERIMENT SITE, DR. SETHNA ADDED. HE SAID THAT THREE TELEVISION CAMERAS HAD BEEN BURIED UNDER GROUND AND THE SCIENTISTS HAD WATCHED THE EXPLOSION ON CLOSED TV CIRCUIT, "WE WON'T SEE THE CAMERAS AGAIN."

3. DR. SETHNA DISMISSED AS HYPOTHETICAL A QUESTION WHETHER INDIAN SCIENTISTS HAD THE CAPABILITY TO MAKE NUCLEAR BOMBS IF THE GOVERNMENT GIVES THE GREEN SIGNAL. HE SAID OUR PROGRAM IS FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES AND WILL REMAIN SO. ANOTHER NEWSMAN ASKED, "WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE NUCLEAR BOMB AND A NUCLEAR DEVICE?" DR. SETHNA SAID, "THE FORMER IS MEANT FOR DESTRUCTIVE PURPOSES AND KILLING PEOPLE AND HENCE THERE IS NO ATTEMPT TO CONTROL THE RADIO ACTIVITY. THE LATTER IS FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES AND ALL EFFORTS ARE MADE TO CONTROL RADIO ACTIVITY AND SHOCK WAVES." ASKED WHETHER THE TEST WOULD AFFECT AID FROM CANADA FOR THE KALPAKKAM AND NARORA ATOMIC POWER STATIONS, DR. SETHNA SAID BOTH PROJECTS WERE BEING CONSTRUCTED WITH INDIGEN- LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OUR KNOW HOW AND MATERIAL. HE FURTHER STATED THAT IT WAS PARTLY THE FAULT OF THE PROGRAM THAT CANADA HAD CUT DOWN ON SUPPLYING MATERIALS FOR KALPAKKAM. A CERTAIN PLANT WAS SCHEDULED TO GO INTO PRODUCTION BUT THIS DID NOT MATERIALIZE. HENCE THERE WAS CERTAIN SHORTAGES, ESPECIALLY OF HEAVY WATER. IN FACT, THERE STILL IS BUT THIS IS BEING OVERCOME.

4. HE URGED NEWSMEN NOT TO GLOAT OVER THE EXPERIMENT AND MAKE IT

LOOK BIGGER THAN WHAT IT WAS--AN EXPERIMENT TO STUDY THE CRATER-
ING EFFECT. HE EMPHASIZED THAT INDIA HAD NOT VIOLATED ANY
INTERNATIONAL TREATY WHILE CONDUCTING THE TEST. INDIA WAS A
SIGNATORY TO THE PARTIAL TEST BAN TREATY AND THIS DID NOT PRE-
VENT IT FROM CARRYING OUT UNDERGROUND EXPLOSIONS. ASKED WHAT
HAPPENS TO THE PLUTONIUM FROM THE SAFEGUARD REACTORS AT TARAPUR
AND RAJASTHAN, SETHNA SAID IT IS BEING USED IN THE FAST BREEDER
REACTOR SYSTEM. THIS IS A TEST REACTOR TO TEST THE BREEDING, NOT
A POWER REACTOR. ALL OF THE PLUTONIUM PRODUCED WILL GO BACK INTO
THE REACTOR. AT THE END OF THE CONFERENCE, DR. SETHNA SHOWED
NEWSMEN A FEW PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE SITE TAKEN BEFORE AND AFTER
THE EXPERIMENT.

5. A LATER NEWS STORY QUOTING INDIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS,
STATED THAT THE FIRST INDIAN NUCLEAR TEST WAS CARRIED OUT IN
THE POKARAN RANGE IN RAJASTHAN'S THAR DESERT. THE OFFICIALS
SAID THE TEST SITE WAS ABOUT 150 KILOMETERS FROM THE PAKISTAN
BORDER. THE POKARAN RANGE RUNS BETWEEN JODHPUR AND JAISALMER
AND IS A VERY SPARSELY POPULATED AREA. MOYNIHAN

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